

# Civil War Book Review

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## Living With History

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## **Editorial**

### **LIVING WITH HISTORY**

**Ng, Laura**

**Fall 2001**

Most often when the term "living history" is used, it is in reference to reenactments. From my short tenure as editor at Civil War Book Review, I find this definition far too limiting. Instead, I turn to T.S. Eliot who once said, "The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence." I think Eliot was on to something. The offerings we bring you in our slick pages-fiction, biographies, revisionist perspectives, and culture manifestations-are all expressions of living history.

Through fiction we invite history to live in our imagination. This mental existence is multiplied when we share stories with children. And in our pages you will find reviews on the latest offerings in children's Civil War literature. Works like Ann Rinaldi's *Girl in Blue* (Scholastic Press, ISBN 0439073367, \$15.95 hardcover) and Ted Lewin's *Red Legs* (HarperCollins, ISBN 0688160247, \$15.95 hardcover) show that, like the future, history can take on life in the fertile mind of a child.

Sometimes the connection between the present and past lives is not readily apparent to young eyes. I can remember when I was a child looking through old photo albums with my mother. At the time, it seemed tedious to sit inside on a perfectly sunny afternoon. Now I understand. Reading biographies is like looking at those photos. In them we find the connection between ourselves and those who came before us. Each picture and book creates a real person out of abstract concept. Through uncovering works like *The Civil War Diary of a Common Soldier* (Louisiana State University Press, ISBN 0807125938, \$29.95 hardcover)-see review by William M. Anderson in our upcoming Winter issue-men such as William Wiley come springing to life with a humor, a horror, and a humanity that is all too easily lost in flat statistics. These words grant us a connection that time and death fails to dull.

Often time allows us to see events with clearer vision. Innovative works that look at strategy, battles, and decisions are not simply asking what could have,

would have, or should have unfolded, but how it colors our present. With the blink of a critical eye, compositions like William C. Davis's *An Honorable Defeat* (Harcourt, ISBN 015005648, \$30.00 hardcover) and Robert G. Tanner's *Retreat to Victory?* (Scholastic Resources Books, ISBN 0842028811, \$55.00 hardcover), bring us the pressures and possibilities surrounding some of the most critical choices made concerning the Confederacy.

We do history a disservice when we categorize it as purely academic; recall the myth that history inhabits only the dustiest and most neglected of tombs. Happily there is Laurence A. Kreiser Jr., who shows us that history has a life beyond the bookshelf, making merry in the realm of popular culture. This illustrates that even in the most vital, electric, and changing part of our society, history lives.

Our offerings in this issue are as diverse as the ways in which history exists among us. I could wax poetical at great length about my ever-changing definition of living history, but instead I will close with the wise words of Stephen Spender: "History is the ship carrying living memories into the future." I hope you enjoy sailing with us.

-Laura Ng